TL 4723

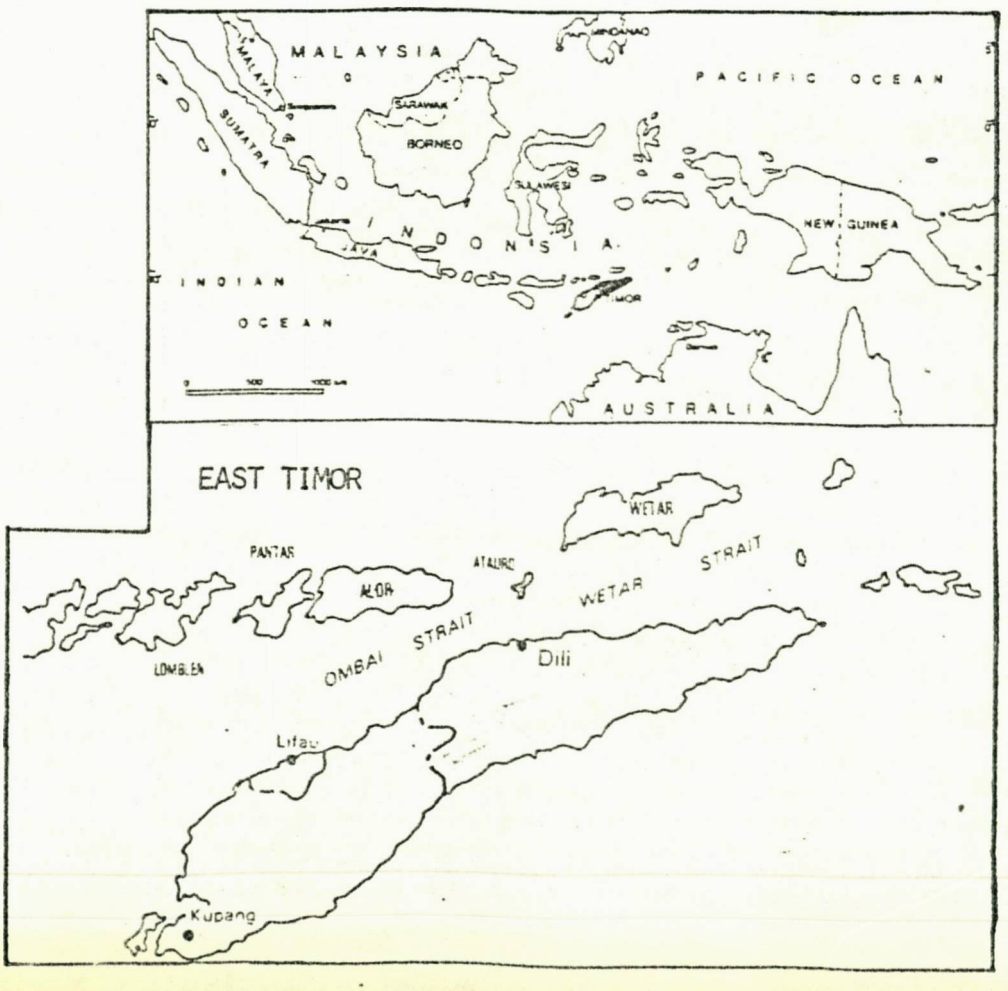
REFLECTION ON EAST TIMOR

* THIS NOTE IS AIMING AT INVITING CHURCHES OF ASIA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES TO A CONCERTATION PROCESS ABOUT THE SITUATION IN EAST TIMOR

* THE DOCUMENT HAS BEEN ADOPTED DURING THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONSULTATION ON EAST TIMOR, HELD IN THE JOHN KNOX CENTER OF GENEVA (14-15 FEBRUARY 1987)

* FIRST SIGNATORIES ARE :
  - JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION IN THE NETHERLANDS
  - KOMMISSIE RECHTVAARDIGHEID EN VREDE (FLAMISH JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION, BRUSSELS)
  - CATHOLIC INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (CIIR), LONDON
  - PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL, ANTWERP-GENEVA

* DISTRIBUTION OF THE DOCUMENT : CIIR, 22 COLEMAN FIELDS, LONDON N1 7AF



REFLECTION ON EAST TIMOR

For more than a decade, we have followed the situation in East Timor and listened with sorrow to the experience of the East Timorese church.

Conscious of the suffering which is being endured by East Timor's people, Christians and non-Christians in many countries have expressed their concern. In 1975, while Portugal and East Timor were engaged in a difficult period of decolonization, the Indonesian armed forces invaded the territory, which from that time has been under miltary occupation. Ever since, East Timor has been the subjnect of dispute in the United Nations and between governments because it raises important questions of international law and justice.

The Concern of the Churches

The churches' concern about East Timor has been expressed on many occasions, by bishops and bishops' conferences in Indonesia, Portugal, Holland, the United States, Japan and by Justice and Peace Commissions and local churches in many countries.

The Catholic Church recognizes East Timor to be a territory in dispute: the Diocese of Dili, which serves East Timor's Catholics, is administered directly from Rome, and run by an Apostolic Administrator; it is not attached to the Indonesian Bishop's Conference. "The Holy See continues to follow the situation in East Timor with preoccupation and with the hope that particular consideration will be given in every circumstance to the ethnic, religious and cultural identity of the people," said Pope John Paul II in 1984. He went on to emphasize the need to safeguard human rights, declaring that "it is the ardent wish of the Holy See to see that all rights of individuals be respected and that every effort be made to lighten the sufferings of the people by facilitating the work of relief organiqtions and by ensuring the access of humanitarian aid to those in need." When the Apostolic Administrator Monsignor Filipe Ximenes Belo was received by the Pope in June 1985, John Paul II told him to "work for the church, to fight the suffering of the people, and seek for a right solution for peace in Timor."

In November 1983, the Catholic Bishops of Indonesia wrote to the clergy in East Timor, acknowledging the suffering and oppression experienced bz the people of the territory and affirming that it was the responsibility of the Indonesian church "to struggle...to enforce acknowledgement and respect for those things which are considered most sacred to the people of East Timor: their religion, their family and their land." They urged the church in East Timor to be the "vanguard of a peace that is more than an absence of war, a balance of pwoer between enemies or what can be brought about by dictatorship."

The Portuguese Catholic bishops issued a similar declaration of sympathy in March 1984, saying they "cannot abstain from

manifesting their great anxiety and deep felt solidarity with the people of this martyrised countrz,which is victim of a tragedy (...) Timor aspires to the full expression of its own identity; to impede this not onlz means a physical genocide, but also a §cultural' genocide (which) attacks both the survivors and those who die, and the future generations as well as the present ones." In November 1985 the Portuguese Protestant Council of Churches also issued a statement. "We join our voice to all those around the wrold who are calling for an immediate end to the present situation in East Timor".

Protestant churches in many countries have debated the question and raised it with their governments. In Asia and the Pacific,associations and communities of both Catholics and Protestants have given their public support to the rights of East Timor's people to self-determination. The issue was recently the subject of controversy within the Christian Conference of Asia.

The Witness of the Church in East Timor

Above all, the Catholic Church of East Timor, working in great isolation and under obvious political constraints, has itself witnessed the tragic experience of the territory's people.

Msgr. Belo and his predecessor Mgr. Martinho da Costa Lopes have each denounced atrocities against the population and described the hardships suffered bz aordinarz people since 1975. The Religious working in East Timor and East Timorese priests have consistently reported violations of human rights and made plain the degree to which the people of the territory, Christians and non-Christians alike, feel themselves to be oppressed in their daily lives and in their hope of freedom and peace.

"The people are now experiencing oppression without end, their rights are not acknowledged. The people do not have a voice and live in fear. Indeed the people live in a situation of continual war, and thus must be silent and submissive. But thez remain in a very clear position concerning their ideals. Their faith stands firm and is strengthened, though it is not alwazs able to be expressed in words." (The Religious in East Timor reflecting upon their expereince in 1981 to the Religious in Indonesia.)

"The war...goes on and continues to grow," wrote the Catholic Council of priests of Dili in 1985. "The evidence for this is the continual arrival of Indonesian troops with heavy war materiel...

In East Timor we are witnessing an upheaval of gigantic and tragic proportions in the social and cultural fabric of the Timorese people and their identity is threatened with death." (Statement, January 1 1985.)

A Human Disaster

In speaking of the conflict in East Timor, and the acute humanitarian and social difficulties faced by Timor's people, it is almost impossible to overstate the effects of the invasion and the conflict which followed it.

There is first of all the cruelty of the physical violence: as a direct and indirect result of the conflict, it is believed that more than 200,000 people have died from an original population estimated to number less than 700,000.

In the absence of a settlement, the Indonesian authorities face the opposition of large sections of the population, which can onlz be concealed by violent repression and unacceptable forms of social control. This opposition is most clearly revealed by the guerilla war which has continued for 11 years.

Whole communities have been moved form their homes into villages under army surveillance. The countryside has been bombed with artillery and from the air. Subsistence agriculture, upon which most Timorese based their lives, has become impossible in many parts. In 1978-79, there was a major famine and even now, there are regularly food shortages in many areas.

The war has been characterized by substantial and widespread violations of human rights, including torture, imprisonment without trial, disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Amnesty International has documented the situation throughout the period and concluded in a substantial report lpublished in 1985, "Indonesian forces in the territory have systematically and persistently engaged in cruel and brutal conduct constituting serious violations of human rights." (1985 Report, p.10).

Fear and mistrust have come to govern the lives of the popualtion, which for more than a decade, has been virtually isolated form the world. Within Timor itself, people are not able to travel at will, to correspond or telephone unhindered, or engage in normal economic activity. They cannot trust one another or speak freely. Individuals suspected of sympathizing with those who continue to resist Indonesia's rule are punished bz death and torture as well as arrest and detention,

"In the interior of the ocuntry, in many villages and concentration camps, the people have no living conditions to help them survive as a people. If you, for example, go through the villages of Luro, Laivai, Tutuala, Iliomar, Uatolari, Cajularan, Lacluta etc., you will see that the people live in a state of permament encirclement. They are not allowed to leave their villages bezond three kilometers, besides, they always have to have a pass issued bz the Indonesian military authorities. It happens easily that East Timorese are accused of having contacts with the guerillas, then they are immediately the victims of torture, massacres, etc. j The people live in huts, but at night they are forced to sleep in ditches inside and outside the hut. The people live in contant tension of fear..." (Excerpt from a private letter, dated February 20 1986 to Mgr. da Costa Lopes, Apolstolic Administrator in Dili Diocese between 1977 and 1983.

There are enormous humanitarian and social problems as a result of the ongoing conflict. Families have been destroyed by killings and forced population movements. The Governor of East Timor, Mario Carrascalao, stated recently that in areas for which information is available there are currently 20,000 orphans, 13,000 widows and 7,000 old and infirm people all in need of care.

Families have been separated. The best documented case is that of the offshore island of Atauro, where several thousand

people were taken from their villages andheld for some zears, before being moved to other areas, often distant from their original communities.

Helath services are virtually non-existent in the country-side, and in the towns, medicines are too expensive for the majority of Timorese. There are fewer health centres than birth control centres. There have been many protests about the birth control programme implemented by the Indonesian government. Mgr. Belo and Mgr. da Costa Lopes both criticized its non-voluntary character and the resort to sterilization method without informing those concerned.

Schools were destroyed and theacher and pupils dispersed. The Indonesian government has built many schools since, but the introduction of the Indonesian language and Indonesian values and culture into schools remains a mattter of contention because of the general political environment. Many Timorese consider their language andculture are being discouraged or suppressed.

Economic Development

There is indeed a need to develop East Timor economically. Timor's people received little benefit from the long period of Portuguese colonial rule.

But the war has done immense damage to the territory's infrastructure, administration and traditional organization.

Timor was sacked during the invasion. The Timorese are still suffering the aftermath. In addition, the Indonesian government is implementing its transmigration policy in East Timor, offering to immigrants from Java, Bali and other parts of Indonesia, loans and assistance which are not made available to Timorese. Indonesian rather than Timorese officials occupy the most senior government posts.

This is placing Timroese in a relation of dependence, so that, in the words of Mgr. Belo, they are becoming second-class citizens in their own country.

The counterinsurgency policies especialy affect the civilian population. Numerous agricultural communities have been moved to new villages under military surveillance. This policy has paralyzed subsistence agriculture, upon which the great majority of the population depended.

Those who continue to farm are unable to sell their crops. In particular, coffee--the only significant export--is bought at very low prices by an Indonesian company which has a trading monopoly.

The Indonesian government's current economic policies give priority to the production of export crops and plantation agriculture. They do not tkae account of the needs of the population, and more especially those of the poorest and most deprived. Such policies cannot result in true development.

Political Issues

It has become clear that there is no likelihood that either side will win a military victory. Jhis makes a political solution all the more necessary.

After Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975, the United Nations condemned Indonesia's actions and called upon the parties to settle the dispute bz negotiation.

The Resolution, passed in 1982, which is still in force, states:

Reconnaissant le droit inalienable de tous les peuples à l'autodetermination et à l'independence en accord avec les principes de la Charte des Nations Unies, la Déclaration du Traite d'Independence pour les pays et Peuples Coloniaux contenne dans sa resolution 1514 (XV) du 14 décembre 1960 et d'autres resolutions relevantes des Nations Unies,

the General Assembly asked the Secretary General "to initiate consultations with all parties directly concerned, with a view to exploring avenues for achieving a comprehensive settlement of the problem."

Portugal's role at this time is especially important, at the diplomatic level, because it is recognized by the international community to be the Administering Power in the territory. This status engages Portugal's resopnsibility to seek, through the international community, a solution that will clearly respect the rights of the people of its ex-colony.

It is nevertheless the Indonesian government which at this stage holds the pwer to permit or prevent progress. We appeal to the Indonesian government to show wisdom and fina a path to a settlement which will permit the people of East Timor to exercise a real choice with regard to their future. In our view, this is the only way to secure a settled political relationship with East Timor, or long-term peace in the region.

It is necessary to consult the people

In view of the profound mistrust generated bz what has taken place, we believe it would be unacceptable to ask any of the parties engaged in the conflict to organize the consultation of Timorese opinion. Only an electoral process internationally organized and supervised will ensure that East Timor's people express their wishes freely and fully exercise the right to self determination. For the process to have meaning, representatives of East Timorese opinion must take part.

People's rights

There is a need to preserve people's rights in the territory including the right to life, as well as protection against political violence or abuses. We applaud the work of organizations such as the ICRC and the local Catholic church and condemn the restrictions placed on their activity, as well as any attempt to exploit their presence forpolitical ends.

We support the efforts of development agencies to provide support to the people of East Timor as they try to develop their territory; these must be seen to reach the very poor.

True development requires openness and participation: it cannot be said to take place when policies to generate economic growth are implemented by force, operate at the expense of the local population, bring no benefit to the poor and disadvanteged, or add exclusively to the wealth of the elites. Indonesian and European development organizations recognize this: "A development

strategy based on the denial of either civil or political rights or both, not only violates international human rights standards , but is also a negation of the very cncept of development." (Submission to Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia--IGGI--by the Inter-NGO Group on IGGI Matters, April 1986).

Access

In both these areas of endeavour, the alleviation of poverty and the alleviation of suffering as a result of the war, we reaffirm the importance of opening the territory to contact with the outside world.

Access is currently restricted to a few selected observers who visit the territory under tightly controlled ocnditions, and a small number of humanitarian aid organizations. Such limited access can only undermine the Indoesian government's claim to have secured Timorese support for integration.

The Church in East Timor

It is the responsibility of Christian leaders to be with their people, and we are in solidarity with Mgr. Belo and the Church in East Timor in their attempts to be with the people of East Timor.

We recognize that the Indonesianchurchesfind themselves in a delicate and difficult situation. We nonetheless consider it essential that they should allow the local church to decide its own status.

In our opinion religious liberty must include the freedom to worship in accordance with local traditions, the right of ministers to visit parishioners in all parts of the territory, and the right of churches to run their own educational and humanitarian institutions. the local church must have the right to invite foreign missionaries to work in the territory.

Conclusions

In describing the situation in East Timor as we have done here, we are expressing our thoughts and feelings as Christians, aware that we all bleong to the same familz of mankind and desiring true fellowship with members of other religions.

We recognize that in the past, our churches have often forsaken their true responsibilties. This was especially true during the period when our countries were colonizing powers. We feel nonetheless that this should not prevent us from speaking out forcefully on the situation which currently prevails in East Timor.

As Christians involved in promoting peace and justice, our concern is above all for the lives and suffeirng of the people of East Timor. It must be acknowledged, since extreme suffering over so many years has not broken the will to resist, that military force will not solve this conflict. Lasting reconciliation will only emerge out of a just settlement, via negot iations in which representatives of the Timorese people have taken part.

We are challenged by the cry of Timor's people. Brothers and sisters in the churches of Asia, let us carry together our share of responsibility for the tragedy which has overtaken East Timor.